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L E T T E R

To the REVEREND

Mr. CALEB EVANS
OF BRISTOL;

OCCASIONED by his

Two SERMONS on the Deity
of the Son and Holy Spirit.



L O N D O N :

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MDCCLXVI.



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L E T T E R

To the REVEREND

Mr. CALEB EVANS.

Reverend Sir,

YOUR zeal which hath exerted
itself, against a late *attempt to*
restore the supreme worship of God
the Father almighty ; must strike
every one, who reads your performance.
Some will think it peculiarly laudable in
you *, as your reverend fathers and bre-
thren slumbered over their flocks, insensible
of the danger, which alarmed your con-
science, and suffered you no longer to keep
B silence.

* Mr. Evans is said to be a young gentleman:

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silence. But this very circumstance, will incline others to suspend their applause, till they have examined, if it be according to knowledge, and the manner in which it hath appeared, entitle it to praise. Of these latter I profess myself, and having no motives to promote any cause, but that of truth and charity, must freely acknowledge, the spirit which your discourses breathe, appears to me on careful inquiry, very different from the meekness and candour, which the Gospel inspires.

You observe very justly, “ that the disputes, which have been agitated concerning your subject, have been the means of leading men off from the practical part of religion, and of kindling that unhallowed fire, which is productive of rage and malice, rather than christian meekness and love.” One would therefore have expected you, to have carefully guarded against these pernicious effects. But have not your sermons a tendency to produce them in a high degree? The introduction in particular, seems admirably calculated, to excite

cite the horror and resentment of your readers, against those who differ from you. There you load them with the severest reproaches. You represent them, as "insulting the dignity of their Saviour, wounding, and trampling under foot, his honour and glory, and discovering an impious joy, at every attempt to degrade him." You say, "there seems to be a kind of partricide, in their conduct, and an impiety, heightened by the aggravating circumstances, of unnatural baseness and disingenuity." And then bring in our Lord's prayer for his murderers, which tends to fix the infamy deeper on them, as it naturally leads the reader's thoughts to those heinous criminals. This appears to me gross misrepresentation. Many who have entertained the sentiments you condemn, have given strong proofs of their religious integrity. They were educated in your opinion. The force of evidence, at least of apparent evidence, obliged them to change it, and defend the supremacy of the father, at the expence of their reputation, and worldly interest; witness Clark and Whiston,

in the church of England, and, among the Dissenters, Emlyn and Pierce. And may we not suppose, that others are actuated by the same principles? For notwithstanding your oratical flourish, on the fashionableness of their notions, it is well known, they expose their abettors to reproach.

Now, will you, in the face of the world, charge such persons with insulting their redeemer, the guilt of parricide, &c? Bel-larmine, in his marks of the true church, tells us, no Papist ever spoke well of any Protestant. And their religion obliges them to condemn all heretics, as enemies to God. But will you, a Protestant, a minister, a Dissenting minister, imitate their bigotry, and represent your fellow Protestants as atrociously wicked, merely because they propagate sentiments different from yours? Should you not think it an instance of detestable bigotry, and flagrant injustice, in any one to charge you with guilt, for strenuously maintaining opinions, which they disapprove? Why then did you not treat them, as you would expect to be treated?

Such

Such instances of uncharitableness, as this, are, in my judgment, more shocking, and more to be lamented, than any mistakes of the understanding relative to this subject. And, I hope, upon a calm review, you will be sensible, you have been transported, beyond the bounds of truth and candor and betrayed into the fault, which you complain of in others.

Well : But why all this severity against your christian brethren ? Have they denied the divinity, or any of the offices, of the Son or Spirit of God, or any express declarations of Scripture concerning them ? This cannot with modesty or truth be pretended. It is only for opposing certain notions concerning their *essence*, and *unity* with the Father, which you suppose taught in scripture ; but which they look upon as inconsistent, both with reason, and the word of God. If they are mistaken in rejecting your account of this subject, yet they should, methinks, be treated with moderation ; since you acknowledge, “ the scriptures have not given us precise ideas,” nay farther tell us,
“ it

“ it is impossible, in the very nature of
 “ things, that we should have any concep-
 “ tion of it.” I have not the least inclination
 to deny, that the unity, for which you con-
 tend, is inconceivable and unintelligible ;
 but hope to make it appear, in the course
 of my remarks on what you have advanced,
 that the scriptural account of the sub-
 ject may be understood by every christian.

You tell us, p. 6. “ That the Divinity
 “ of Christ is very injuriously represented,
 “ when it is supposed to interfere with the
 “ supreme worship of the Father.”

It is really surprising, you should allow
 the worship due to the Father, to be su-
 preme ; when you maintain, in almost the
 next words, that Christ hath a right to e-
 qual honour. This is to confound the most
 different ideas. Equality and supremacy
 are as inconsistent, as light and darkness ;
 and the least regard to consistency, requires
 you, either to deny that the Father hath a
 right to supreme worship ; or else acknow-
 ledge, that the worship of the Son is inferior.

But

But not to dwell on this inconsistency. You maintain, that the honor of the Son is founded on “ his being, in *nature* and essence, *one* with the Father.” It would have been kind in you, to have produced some passage of scripture, wherein this is plainly asserted; since those, which occur to me, build it on a different foundation. Our Saviour grounds it, on *the Father’s having committed all judgment to him*, John v. 22, 23. St. Paul likewise represents God’s exalting him, as the reason, why *every knee should bow to him, and every tongue confess him to be Lord*, Phil. ii. 9, &c. And the praises represented, Rev. v. 12. as offered to him, are founded on his *death: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor, &c.* The same reason is given Heb. ii. 9. Here we plainly see, the foundation laid in scripture of the honor paid to our Lord, viz. the authority which the Father hath given him, and the offices he sustains.

As this is the true ground, of the worship paid to our Lord; so it is sufficient to support the honor and regard, which
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are required in scripture, and which should be given him to the *glory of God the Father*, Phil. ii. 11. They who attend to the scriptural account of this subject, will be in no danger (as you imagine, p. 24.) of offering any worship to our Lord, that would interfere with that of the Father. God is so far from giving his glory to another, or lessening that supreme homage, which is due to him from all creatures, by appointing the blessed Jesus to be our Lord; that in reality he hath thereby displayed it, in a remarkable manner. Thus the honor paid to a wise and good magistrate, instead of detracting from, advanceth, the honor of the sovereign, who invested him with authority.

Your second preliminary observation,
 “ That the doctrine of Christ’s true and
 “ proper Deity, is by no means set in oppo-
 “ sition to the unity of God ;” seems as lia-
 ble to objections, as your first. Our blessed
 Lord informs us, that his Father is the *only*
true God, John xvii. 3. *That they might know*
thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom
thou

thou hast sent. And St. Paul declares; 1 Cor. viii. 6. *to us there is one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.* Your account of our Saviour's Deity seems to me directly repugnant to these declarations. Instead of maintaining, that the Father is the only true God; you contend, that *two other persons* are the true God, in the very same sense with him. And instead of saying with St. Paul, *there is one God the Father*; you insist upon it, that the *one God*, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You deny, indeed, that you believe in three Gods, but your expressions suppose it; and all your attempts to vindicate yourself, from the charge of inconsistency, will be found unsatisfactory. The Papists profess to believe, there is but one Christ; and yet pretend to give his body, at the very same time, to different communicants. This no doubt is a notorious inconsistency. But don't they plead, in their defence, your doctrine? And must not an impartial man acknowledge, it is equally

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inconsistent to maintain, that *three* persons are *each* of them God, in the highest sense, and yet that there is but *one* God; with asserting, that though the complete body of Christ be eaten at the same time by each communicant, yet there is but one body.—Your representing the existence, spirituality, &c. of God, which as you graciously express it, “the exalted tribe of rationalists condescend to believe,” as similar to this, is quite unjust. Our ideas of these subjects, though not adequate, are perfectly consistent. Whereas your notion, contradicts the clearest principles of truth and reason.

The similies you bring, to illustrate your doctrine, are little to the purpose. That of a father and a son, if it give any notion, it is that of two distinct beings; which is utterly inconsistent with the unity of essence, for which you contend. And the other, taken from the body, soul, and spirit of man, gives the idea of one person compounded of different parts; which is a dishonourable sentiment of God, as well

as repugnant to your account of three persons. Indeed, I have long been convinced, the modern orthodox divines, if they explained themselves, would appear either Tritheists or Sabellians.

It seems you have no conception, how the Father and Son are one. Is not this owing to your not attending to the scriptural account of their unity, particularly to our Lord's explanation of it? John xvii. 11. *Holy Father keep through thy own name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.* And in the 20th and 21st verses, *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me, through their word, that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they may be one in us.* It is manifest from these expressions of our Lord, that the union between him and the Father is, of a moral nature, a union of design and affection; since it is of that kind, which he prays might take place between his disciples. In this sense the expression, *being one*, is generally used in holy scripture.

ture. Thus 1 Cor. iii. 6, 8. Paul and Apollos are said to be *one*. And Beza owns this expression should be thus understood in the disputed text, John i. 5, 7.

Your arguing likewise for a unity of essence, p. 33. from the words of our Lord, *I am in the Father, and the Father in me*; is quite inconclusive: since this kind of language is applied to Christians, as well as to our Saviour, John xvii. 23. *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one*; and 1 John iv. 12, 15. *If we love one another God dwelleth in us. Whosoever shall confess, that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.* Were any thing more necessary, to convince you of the weakness of your argument; I would draw a conclusion from these passages, similar to yours. ‘If these be not full assertions of the *unity* and *equality*, of all good Christians with the Father, words cannot express any such thing.’

You roundly assert, p. 22. that the high titles of *only wise God*, the *true God*, and
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the *only God*, are ascribed to Christ. But herein I apprehend you are mistaken. Had you contented yourself with saying, the word *God* was applied to him in holy scripture; your assertion would not have been disputed. But surely no one who considers, in what a low sense, that word is sometimes used, can urge it to prove his *equality* with the Father, *his God and our God*. This title was given by divine authority to Moses, *Exod. vii. 1. The Lord said unto Moses, see I have made thee God to Pharoah.* And it is applied to magistrates, *Psal. lxxxii. 6. I said ye are Gods, and all of you children of the most high.* To this manner of speaking, and probably to these words, our Saviour referred, to vindicate himself from the calumny of the Jews, who absurdly charged him with blasphemy, for saying he was *the Son of God*. *John x. 34. Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said ye are Gods? If he called them Gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said, I am*
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the Son of God! Nothing could be more unreasonable than to blame our Lord, for assuming a title, which had been given to some of their ancestors; when he was invested with much greater authority, than any of them had ever possessed. And it is as surprising, that his followers should endeavour to prove his equality with the Father, by an argument, which, if just, would equally prove, the Jewish magistrates to have been likewise equal to the supreme being.

As the title of God will not; so neither will the word *Jehovah*, if it be applied to him, prove him to be the supreme being; since it is given to the angel of the Almighty, *Exod. xxiii. 20.* And the person, who conducted the Israelites, is frequently called *Jehovah*, though we are informed he was an angel, and not the supreme being himself, who is invisible.

Glorious titles are undoubtedly ascribed to our blessed Lord; which express abilities equal to the important work he hath under-

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dertaken. But, as he represents these as all derived from the Father, John v. 19, &c. so he disclaims the absolute perfection of the supreme being. Thus he assures us, Matt. xxiv. 36. Mark xiii. 32. *Of that day (viz. of judgment) knoweth no man, no not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.* Where you see he excludes himself, and all persons and beings, but the Father, from the knowledge of that day. It is difficult, if not impossible, to express this sentiment in a stronger manner than he hath done. Had he only told us, that neither men, nor angels, nor he himself, knew that day, we could have had no reason to suspect, it was known to any one besides the Father. But not content with that, he assures us farther, that the *Father only* knew it. And yet, notwithstanding all this, some would persuade us, that Christ knew it then, as well as the Father.

As for the distinction of two natures, it will not avail the patrons of it in the least, in this instance. If our Lord was possessed of two natures, he must have spoken of him-

himself in the highest; since he distinguished himself both from men and angels. Beside, is it not a direct contradiction, to say the Father *only* knew it, if our Lord knew it likewise? It would certainly be thought so in any other case. And if this method of interpreting holy scripture be admitted, the greatest uncertainty and confusion must unavoidably prevail.

Your notion of two distinct natures in Christ, of perfect God, and perfect man, doth not appear to have the least foundation in scripture. It is likewise preposterous, to say no worse, to suppose the supreme being, and a human soul, to be *one person*. Besides, this opinion is quite inconsistent with the scriptural account of Christ's humiliation. St. Paul extols his grace in becoming poor, 2 Cor. viii. 9, &c. and afterwards submitting to death. But certainly the supreme being could not become poor. He is eternally unchangeable in his nature and state. It is horrible to think, the blessed God can ever be divested of his original, essential, riches and glory. Who then did
become

become poor? A man that was never rich! Who did suffer and die? A man born in a low condition, and subject to the infirmities of humanity! Thus you reduce all the wondrous grace of God, and of our Lord, in these transactions, as low as the Socinians, who speak as honorably of Christ, considered as a man, as you can possibly do. How much nobler is the scriptural account of these matters? which represents him, as the *word of God*, as voluntarily laying aside his dignity and glory, *taking flesh*, and submitting to poverty, pain, and death, for our sakes. Here, Sir, is astonishing condescension, grace and love, which must fill the hearts of those who view them in a true light, with exalted admiration and fervent gratitude, and lay a foundation for trust and joy, far superior to what the labours and sufferings of a mere man, can possibly excite. I might now appeal to every impartial person, which notion tends to fill the mind, with the highest sentiments of respect, love, and thankfulness, to the redeemer: that which represents him condescending, suffering and dying, merely as

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a man;

a man ; or that which exhibits him, as one who had honor and happiness with the Father before the world was, invested with a human body.

Here I might conclude my address, having, I apprehend, shewn the groundlessness of your scheme, but as you seem to triumph in several passages of scripture, you will indulge me with the liberty of examining those, on which you lay the greatest stress.

Your text may very well be understood of the Father, as it is said to have been by the ancients. Relatives do not always refer to the immediate antecedents. And, that the word, *this*, actually respects the Father, may be justly inferred from the declaration of our Lord, who styles *him* the *only true God* ; since it cannot be supposed, that this apostle would contradict his blessed master, whose words he hath given us.

It is enough to obviate your argument from Isaiah ix. 6. to observe, that if the word God, can be given to a man, as we
have

have proved before, the appellation, a *migh-*
ty God, may be applied to our Lord, with-
 out leading a plain christian to think him
 the supreme being.

If you had looked into the original, you
 would hardly have quoted Zech. xiii. 7.
 You would have found, it should have been
 rendered by a term of greater latitude, as
 it is by the LXX. Though the word *fel-*
low, by no means always denotes an e-
 qual.

Your argument from John viii. 58. *be-*
fore Abraham was I am, hath the misfor-
 tune to depend on the similitude of our en-
 glish translation of this passage, to that in
 Exodus, to which you refer. For there is
 not this similitude in the originals. And
 how much more agreeable to the design of
 our Saviour's discourse, would it have been,
 to have translated the greek word *I was*, or
I have been, as it is rendered John xiv. 9.
 Which substitution, of one tense for ano-
 ther, is no uncommon thing. As it now
 stands, it is a solecism indeed in every sense.

The passage in Phil. ii. 6. when rightly translated, gives not the least ground to your reasoning, but quite the contrary. *Who, being in the form of God, was not tenacious of his likeness to God, but emptied himself, &c.* This being the case, he could not be equal to the Father; because the supreme being cannot possibly empty himself of his perfections, glory or happiness, as you in the most astonishing manner, seem to imagine he may, at least your language supposeth it, p. 37.

When the imagine or representation of any thing, and the thing itself, are the same, then may Heb. i. 3. be alledged with propriety, in defence of your doctrine; till then, it will be thought a proof of the contrary.

I shall only take notice of one text more on this head, Col. ii. 9. *In him, i. e. Christ, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.* In this you triumph, as if you had gained a complete victory. What ground you had for

for your exultation will appear, by comparing it with another passage of the same sacred writer, Ephes. iii. 19. where he prays for the Christians to whom he wrote, in the following words ; *That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.* As your language and reasoning on the former are curious, I will adorn my page with them, in illustrating the latter. “ Now let the
 “ adversaries of the glory of the saints try,
 “ whether they can possibly find out words
 “ that can more fully express the essential
 “ perfection, and highest dignity of the
 “ divine nature, than these do. The apostle
 “ prays, you see, that *they*, that is, their per-
 “ sons, *might be filled*, not with the nature of
 “ God only, not with communicated power
 “ and honor only, but with God himself.
 “ And lest this should not be sufficient, it
 “ is not in measure, but *the fulness of God*;
 “ yea, to leave their divinity, in the pro-
 “ perest and highest sense, without any
 “ dispute, *all the fulness of God*, that rich
 “ abundance of incomprehensible perfec-
 “ tions, of which the divine nature is full;
 “ all

“ all will reside in them, when the apostle’s
 “ prayer is answered.”

This specimen of your manner of argumentation I shall leave to your consideration; and, that you may not think me guilty of slighting your second performance, proceed to mention a few things relating to it. You acknowledge, p. 59. “ that the
 “ Holy Ghost, in many places, is put for the
 “ gifts and powers, &c.” And that the words Spirit, Holy Spirit, have various significations in scripture, cannot, in my opinion, be reasonably disputed. It would be tedious, to explain all the places in which these expressions are used: Yet give me leave to produce one, which strongly asserts the *personality*, and as clearly teacheth the *inferiority* of the Holy Spirit to the Father. John xvi. 13. *When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you in all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.* Where the Spirit’s guiding the disciples into all truth, is represented by our Lord, as depending on his not speaking of himself, but following the in-
 struc-

structions given him. Can this, with propriety, be said of the supreme being? Of, or from whom, can the supreme being speak, but from himself? Is there any one to instruct him what he shall speak? The distinction of two natures cannot be pleaded against this argument, as it is against those which are brought to prove the inferiority of our Lord to the Father almighty.

You tell us, p. 62. "The Holy Ghost is expressly stiled God, in the words of the text." It seems, you have mistaken an inference of your own, for an express assertion of scripture. Your argument is this. Ananias lied unto the Holy Ghost; but he lied unto God; therefore the Holy Ghost is God. Give me leave to reason in a similar manner, and you will see the fallacy of it. Ananias lied to Peter and other apostles; but he lied not unto men, but unto God; therefore Peter and the apostles were not men, but God. Our Lord, Mat. x. 40. told his disciples, *That he who received them, received him, and he that received him, received him that sent him.* The disciples,

ples, by this way of arguing, were both our Lord and the Father. But, Sir, there is a much better method of interpreting these, and such like, expressions of scripture. He that received our Lord's disciples, was said to receive him, because they acted by his authority and direction. And in like manner, he who lied to the Holy Ghost, and to the apostles, might be said to lie unto God, by whose authority they acted. Though could it be proved that the Holy Spirit was stiled God, it would not follow that he is the supreme being, since that title is given both to angels and men.

The Spirit of God, 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11. seems not to denote a person distinct from him whom our Lord stiles the *only true God*; since the spirit of a man, by which it is illustrated, doth not signify a person, or any thing different from the man himself.

The want of evidence, to prove the Holy Ghost an object of prayer or praise, appears from your mistaking wishes, or desires, for petitions; which are very different.

Thus,

Thus, were I to say to any one, May you enjoy the favour of good men! Or, good angels attend you! Would any one call this a prayer to them? No more can the benevolent wish of St. Paul for the Corinthians; or the salutation of St. John to the seven churches in Asia, Rev. i. 4. (on which you have shewn your dexterity in attempting to prove seven Spirits to be one Spirit) be with any propriety styled prayers. Nothing more needs be said on this head. The force of truth obliged Dr. Watts to confess, there is no express precept, or example, of prayer, or praise, directly offered to the Holy Spirit. Though if there had, it would not have proved him to be the supreme being; since prayers and thanks are addressed to our fellow-creatures. And, in the general sense of the word, *worship* itself is given to magistrates; thus in a solemn assembly of the Jews, where David was present, we are told, 1 Chron. xxix. 20. *All the congregation worshipped the Lord, and the king.* As, indeed, it is a common term in the present age, for the respect due to persons in authority.

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The form of baptism, though it lead us to consider the Holy Ghost, as executing an important office in the scheme of our redemption, doth by no means prove him to be equal to the Father. This will be manifest from the words of St. Paul, 1 Cor. x. 2. who speaking of the Israelites saith, *They were all baptized into Moses.* How unreasonable would it be for any one to argue from this passage, that Moses was the supreme God! And yet, according to your reasoning, why should it be thought unreasonable? Might not one ask, Is there a more solemn act of worship than baptism, &c?

Under the Mosaic dispensation, the Jews were prohibited to consider any being, as possessed of spiritual authority over them, and pay it homage, except the supreme; though the first commandment did not forbid them to pay a proper respect, or worship, to magistrates. But since the dispensation of the Gospel hath taken place, in which Christ is vested with all authority, we do not transgress it in the least, by giving

ing him honor, in obedience to the command of God his Father, and to his glory. Upon this principle our Lord's answer to the devil was just, and your argument is inconclusive.

Did my engagements permit, and were it necessary, it would be very easy to give a particular answer, to every argument you have advanced ; but, I apprehend, what hath been offered is sufficient ; which I submit to your impartial consideration, and hope it will convince you of the unreasonableness of the severity, and contempt, with which you have treated persons of different sentiments on this subject, and relieve you under those painful apprehensions you entertain of their deplorable state. It would give me great pleasure, could I be the means of bringing you back into that moderate and practical way of preaching, on which it is said you entered, when you first appeared as a minister in this city. This would certainly be more conducive to the edification of your audience, as well as to your own peace, and the harmony of christian societies,

ties, than the warmest zeal you can express for the notions of a party. In the prosecution of these important ends I heartily wish you success, and am,

Your humble Servant.

LONDON,
May 24, 1766.



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